

Jazz festival to feature SNL saxophonist

Saxophonist Ron Blake, a 15-year veteran of NBC's "Saturday Night Live" Band, will be the guest artist at the 23rd annual Holyoke Community College Jazz Festival next weekend.

The two-day festival opens Friday, March 13, with an 8 p.m. concert that will feature Blake playing with the Amherst Jazz Orchestra under the direction of David Sporny on the stage of the Leslie Phillips Theater in the HCC Fine & Performing Arts building, on the main campus at 303 Homestead Ave., Holyoke.

Apart from performing on SNL, Blake is also a professor of saxophone and jazz studies at the Juilliard School of Music. He has performed and recorded with the Grammy-winning Christian McBride Big Band, Roy Hargrove, Art Farmer, Spirit Music Jamia, Red, Hot + Riot, and the Grammy-nominated Latin pop group Yerba Buena. Originally from the Virgin Islands, the New York City resident is also a band leader with three albums and some 50-plus recordings as a side man to his credit.

"Ron is one of the world's leading

saxophonists, a great instructor, and a versatile performer," said Robert Ferrier, festival organizer, HCC music professor and jazz guitarist. "He plays baritone sax on 'Saturday Night Live,' but he'll be playing tenor sax with us. It's going to be a lot of fun."

The HCC festival will continue on Saturday, March 14, with big band and jazz combo performances by high school and HCC jazz students from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., in the Leslie Phillips Theater. Jazz clinics, workshops and jam sessions will be held throughout the day in the HCC Recital Hall (FPA Building, Room 137). Blake will conduct two music clinics, one at 11 a.m. and another at 1 p.m.

A concluding concert will be held in the theater 4-5 p.m. on Saturday, with Blake performing with a select combo of students representing each of the participating high schools, HCC students and festival faculty.

Tickets for the Friday night concert are \$15, or \$10 for seniors and non-HCC students, and \$7 for HCC students, staff and faculty with a valid ID.

All Saturday events are free and



Ron Blake, the saxophonist on "Saturday Night Live" and a Juilliard professor, will be the guest artist at next weekend's 23rd annual Holyoke Community College Jazz Festival. *Submitted photo*

open to the public. Musicians who wish to participate in workshops will be charged a nominal registration fee.

For information, contact Robert Ferrier at 413-552-2480 or rferrier@hcc.edu.